Education in Video Games

Community Fifthpaw Oct 22, 2020

Written by Jaydotremy. Class is in session.

The clock strikes 3pm. A group of children excitedly enter a classroom with a wide variety of computers, tablets and phones. The teacher at the front of the room seems to share in their excitement. With a big smile he says “Good afternoon class and welcome to *The Video Game Club*”. The students excitedly boot up and login to *Minecraft*, and begin going over their weekly assignments and talking points.

On a list of school activities I wish I had growing up, this is somewhere near the top. Fortunately, after teaching for nearly 10 years, this is something that I champion to become a reality in all schools. The cultural impact that the video game industry has had on children is undeniable. Surviving repeated witch hunts in the 1990s linking them to violence, we currently live in a society where they are more normalized and embraced than ever.

From a critical education viewpoint, there are many benefits to embracing this pass time within the walls of a classroom.

From an educational stand point, there is great value in a great variety of video games currently available. As I previously had mentioned, I had worked in a school that had a Minecraft club after “traditional classes” were over, that students could sign up for. Minecraft is an incredible example of a game that has been and continues to be an absolute phenomenon, while offering kids educational substance and value through them using a variety of problem solving skills.

For those unware, Minecraft is a video game first released in public alpha in 2009. This independent (or “*indie*”) video game may seem simple at first glance, with a visual throwback to graphics from a far gone age of gaming. However, spend a few minutes playing and you will quickly learn not to judge a book by its cover. **It is everything but simple**. In its essence, this is a game about creation. It is a “*sandbox*” game, as in playing in a virtual sandbox, using tools and a freedom to explore with no linear objective. You are free to experiment and build as you see fit. Herein, lies the education and the appeal. As of this year, *126 million players* seem to agree with me.

A combination of spatial awareness, geometry, both critical and abstract thinking, problem solving, resource management and perhaps most importantly, patience, are all key principals that can be gleaned from playing this game. These are all important skills for any young and evolving mind. Quite frankly, the creativity and ingenuity on display in some of these young men and women’s creations are nothing short of marvelous. So much learning and ingenuity is possible in this game that its merits are far too numerous to ignore.

In fact, there is a now a ***Minecraft Education Edition***, dedicated to exactly this, with a portal and guides of its own. I encourage you to check it out here.

While the educational importance of games like Minecraft are seemingly growing every day, it is equally important to note the social emotional impact that having a video game club within the walls of education can bring. Often times, a variety of social emotional issues can stand in the way of student learning and growth. One of my educational mantras over the past 10 years has stemmed from what's known as *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. A quick glance at Mr. Maslow's pyramid will tell you that that nothing is more important, nor can any true student learning happen, without safety and one's basic needs met. If a student does not have love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization, no true learning and growth can happen. A connection through video games in an educational environment can fundamentally help all of these areas.

Now, I'm not saying that video games are a cure all for a student's varied and complex needs. That would be a largely untrue and far too grand and sweeping a statement. However, in my experience, having something as seemingly simple as a group of students who are all connected by a shared, engaging hobby and community can go a very long way in creating comfort in a class room. By giving these students something they inherently enjoy and the freedom to explore and learn from it at school, you are creating a built in community that has the potential to grow outside of the pixel walls of their screens. This sense of community, achievement and enjoyment goes a

long way in making a student more available to try other challenges, experiences and be more willing to communicate with peers and teachers.

If I had my way, a video game club would be offered in every school, all around the world. Society seems to finally be realizing what we gamers have known all along: Video games are *important*. They have *meaning*. They have *value*. I eagerly look forward to see what the continuing and growing marriage of education and video games yield in the future.

Class dismissed.